

The First 50 Women in Idaho Law

INA MAE WHEELER HANFORD

September 13, 1952



Ina Mae Wheeler Hanford was born on May 29, 1928, in a farmhouse north of Bonners Ferry, Idaho. Hanford's parents, Perley and Eva Wheeler, moved to Bonners Ferry in 1921, after having met on the prairies in Montana where her mother's parents had relocated from Wisconsin and her father's parents from Maine. Her father enlisted in the United States Army during World War I and was stationed with the Spruce Division in Seaside, Oregon, where her parents were married in 1918. Hanford was the third of six girls and one boy in the Wheeler family. Hanford describes her life growing up on the farm as,

pretty simple – centered around school, Sunday services (non-denominational) and family life. We were all expected to help with household chores. In the summer we had a huge garden and our small herd of cows was sent out daily to feed on the open range. We had no electricity until REA came through in about 1937.

Hanford attended a small two-room school in Bonners Ferry through the 7th grade, but moved to Northside Grade School for 8th grade when the district boundaries were changed. Hanford recalls this was the year of Pearl Harbor and her teacher left to join the Navy almost immediately. Bonners Ferry High School was, and is, the only high school in Boundary County. Although bus service was in place by the time Hanford attended high school, her older sisters weren't so lucky. Hanford recalls that they "had to room and board in town" in order to go to school. Hanford graduated as Valedictorian of her high school class in 1946. She had always thought that she would become a schoolteacher as her older sister had (whom she idolized), but in the spring of her senior year Hanford worked as a secretary for a local attorney. While working in that law office, Hanford was encouraged to pursue the study of law and repeatedly told that she had the ability to become a lawyer.

Although Hanford did not have the money to attend college after high school, she did enroll a year later, in the fall of 1947, at Idaho State College where she entered as a pre-law student. At the time, you could earn a Bachelor of Laws degree with two years of pre-law study and three years of law school. After completing two years at Idaho State College, Hanford transferred to the University of Idaho College of Law in the fall of 1949. Hanford recalls that there were three women students in her law school class and all were "well accepted by the men in the law school."

Three years at law school passed "rather uneventfully" and Hanford graduated in 1952. By that time, however, her plans of going into private practice at her former employer's law office had fallen through, so she returned to her parents' home in Bonners Ferry to help them on the farm and study for the bar exam scheduled for August 1952. In mid-July, however, she got an unexpected call from Glenn Bandelin, an attorney in Sandpoint, who asked her if she would be

interested in clerking for U.S. District Court Judge Chase A. Clark (Dean Stimson at the University of Idaho College of Law had recommended Hanford for the position). Hanford jumped at the chance, and after an interview with Glenn in Sandpoint, was hired by Judge Clark.

Hanford moved to Boise and began working for Judge Clark on July 26, 1952. His chambers and courtroom were on the second floor of the old Federal Building/United States Post Office at the corner of 8th and Bannock. Shortly thereafter, Hanford sat for the Idaho bar exam and was admitted on September 13, 1952, the same day as her classmate Jeanne S. Pollett (No. 24 on this list).

Hanford was Judge Clark's second law clerk, while Boise attorney Carl Burke was his first from 1950-51. At that time, Judge Clark was the only Federal District Judge in Idaho and twice a year he and his clerk (Hanford) traveled to Pocatello, Moscow, and Coeur d'Alene for court sessions. Hanford describes her time clerking with Judge Clark as exciting and challenging, exposing her to some of the "outstanding legal minds" of Idaho.

In 1955, Judge Fred Taylor was appointed to fill the second judgeship created after President Eisenhower's election. This split the work in Idaho and so with time available, both judges were assigned to help out in other jurisdictions. Over the years, in addition to traveling throughout Idaho, Hanford joined Judge Clark in court in Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Las Vegas and cities in South Carolina and Virginia. Hanford recalls that probably some of her more interesting assignments were traveling to Hawaii and Alaska after those states were admitted to the union to assist in the transition from territorial courts to federal courts.

While the usual tenure for a federal law clerk is one or two years, Judge Clark told Hanford that as long as she wanted to stay in her position he was not interested in training a new law clerk. Hanford enjoyed the work and travel, she was still single, she was accepted by her peers, and made a good living. She recalls, "most of the women practicing had difficulty making a good living," so Hanford decided to stay with Judge Clark – a position she held for 12 years. Along the way, of course, she was offered various jobs, including a position in a Boise firm as a legal researcher and the possibility of becoming local counsel for the Small Business Association, but none of the offers appealed to her.

Former Idaho Supreme Court Justice Robert E. Bakes recalls,

Judge Clark relied upon [Hanford] extensively in deciding his cases and writing his opinions, and if Ina Mae thought your case had merit, you usually won. She was part of the reason why Judge Clark was such a successful judge. Not to take anything away from him, but with his practice experience, his political insights, and her legal analysis, they made a good team.

In April 1964, Hanford went to work for the newly appointed United States District Court Judge Raymond McNichols because Judge Clark had stepped down in his active role and assumed the status of Senior Judge. Shortly thereafter Hanford married William Hanford, and by the end of September 1964, the newlyweds had decided to move to Portland, Oregon. Since she no longer

lived in Idaho, Hanford allowed her Idaho license to go inactive and thus began “an new era” in her life.

Hanford lived in Portland from 1964-74 and stayed home to raise her two children; Mark, born in 1967, and Jill, born in 1970. In 1974, the Hanford family decided to return to Boise, at which time Carl Burke worked hard to have the SBA offer Hanford a job. Hanford respectfully declined the offer and, instead, became very involved in the community, including church activities, volunteering and with the PTA as an officer at the local, district and state levels.

Eventually, after her husband had taken over a dealership for material handling equipment, Hanford joined her husband’s business and became officer manager at Hanford Industrial Sales in Garden City. The business also became the Contract Station for the U.S. Postal Service in Garden City, which helped to supplement the family’s income and provide more contact with the residents of the area. After her husband’s death in 1984, his business partner came in to help run the business. He supervised the sales and service department and Hanford supervised the office and parts department and the Post Office. She worked in this business and as the Garden City postmistress until she sold the business and retired in 1999.

In her retirement, Hanford has traveled extensively throughout the world, including Europe, Africa, Egypt, Israel, Canada and the Inland Passage in Alaska and looks forward to more trips in the future. Hanford resides in Boise.